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VACANT DWELLING UNITS IN THE UNITED STATES
FOURTH QUARTER 1955

The available¹ vacancy rate for the United States rose slightly--from 2.3 percent in the third quarter to 2.7 percent in the fourth quarter 1955--according to the results of sample surveys conducted by the Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce. The increase occurred entirely in the "for rent" segment, the percentage having risen from 1.8 percent in the third quarter to 2.2 percent in the fourth quarter. The "for sale" portion, on the other hand, remained the same, 0.5 percent.

The rise in the available-for-rent vacancies in the United States resulted very largely from the increase in the available rental supply in the South and in the North Central Regions. However, the highest available rental rates in the fourth quarter were in the West and in the South--3.2 and 3.0 percent, respectively. The North Central, with 1.7 percent, was next; and the Northeast, with 1.2 percent, continued to have the lowest rate of the four regions.

The percentage increase in available rental vacancies was greater for rural housing than for urban housing, although urban units continued to make up a larger portion of the rental vacancies than rural units. For rural housing, the available rental vacancy rate rose from 1.5 in the third quarter to 2.0 percent in the fourth quarter; and for urban housing, from 2.0 to 2.3 percent. Further, the increase in the available rental vacancies was greater for housing outside standard metropolitan areas than inside the areas. The rate outside standard metropolitan areas increased from 2.0 to 2.5 percent, as compared with 1.7 to 1.9 percent inside standard metropolitan areas.

In addition to the increase in the available rental vacancies, there seems to be some indication of an increase in vacant units "held off the market." Such vacancies consist of units which are intended for year-round occupancy and are not dilapidated, but are held off the rental and sale market by the owner for various reasons. Included are units reserved for the owner's occasional use, units temporarily not on the market for personal reasons of the owner, and units not offered for rent or sale because they are in locations where there is little demand for them. The owner's intended use of the unit may change from time to time, so that a vacancy may shift into and out of the "held off market" category. Because of the instability of this classification, the change from the third to the fourth quarter (1.6 percent to 2.0 percent) may not be significant.

Table A.--VACANT DWELLING UNITS BY CONDITION AND STATUS,
FOR THE UNITED STATES: 1955 AND 1950
(Percent distribution)

Condition and status	Fourth quarter 1955	Third quarter 1955	Second quarter 1955	April 1950
All dwelling units..	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Year-round vacant:				
Not dilapidated.....	5.1	4.4	4.3	3.3
For rent or for sale (available).....	2.7	2.3	2.3	1.6
For rent.....	2.2	1.8	1.8	1.1
For sale only.....	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Rented or sold, awaiting occupancy.....	0.4	0.5	0.5	1.7
Held off market ¹	2.0	1.6	1.5	
Dilapidated ¹	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.1
Seasonal ¹	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.5
Occupied.....	91.3	91.9	91.9	93.1

¹ An available vacant dwelling unit is a unit which is intended for year-round occupancy, is not dilapidated, and is offered for rent or sale.

¹ Comprises unoccupied units and units temporarily occupied by nonresidents, that is, persons with usual residence elsewhere.

The 1955 fourth quarter statistics are averages for the three months, October, November, and December. Changes since the previous quarter in the available-for-rent vacancies and in those held off the market are discussed above. For other types of vacant units (available for sale only, already rented or sold but not yet occupied, and dilapidated) and for seasonal units, the rates for the United States as a whole remained at about the same level as in the second and third quarters 1955 and about the same as in April 1950. For some of the subclasses of vacant units, there appear to be relatively large differences from quarter to quarter; care should be used in making comparisons between quarters for distributions based on small subclasses, since the results for the 1955 statistics are based on sample surveys and small differences may not be significant.

Available-for-rent vacancies

On the whole, even though there was an increase in available rental vacancies, the characteristics of the units changed very little since the second quarter 1955, when the first of this series of surveys was made. During the fourth quarter, the average (median) size of the available rental vacancies was 3.2 rooms. Approximately one-seventh (14 percent) were 1- or 2-room units with no bedroom. About one-half (46 percent) contained only 1 bedroom; and the remainder (40 percent) had 2 bedrooms or more--the type of unit most likely to be suitable for family groups.

Rental vacancies did not predominate in any one type of structure. Two out of five (40 percent) were single-unit structures, about the same proportion (36 percent) were in the smaller multi-unit structures of 2 to 4 units, and the remainder (24 percent) were in properties containing 5 or more apartments.

At the time of the survey, a substantial proportion of the rental vacancies had been vacant for only a short period. Approximately four-tenths had been vacant less than one month. On the other hand, three-tenths had been vacant for four months or longer.

Data on rent and utilities were obtained only for nonfarm vacancies. Such data were not obtained for farm units because of the difficulty of separating the rent for the dwelling unit from the rent for the farm land.

The median monthly rental asked for nonfarm rental vacancies was \$48, that is, half the units were to rent for less than \$48 and half

were to rent for more than that amount. This is little different from the corresponding median of \$46 for the third quarter 1955 but higher than the \$43 in April 1950.

The median rent asked for vacant units does not necessarily represent the rent level of all rental units (occupied and vacant). Further, the trend in rent of vacant units does not necessarily reflect the change in the general rent level since the earlier period.

Over four-tenths of the nonfarm vacancies renting for less than \$30 had been vacant for four months or longer. On the other hand, only slightly more than one-tenth of the vacancies over \$75 had been vacant for as long as four months.

The low rental vacancies also were generally smaller than the high rental group. Whereas four-tenths of the nonfarm rental vacancies less than \$30 contained 1 or 2 rooms, only one-tenth of those over \$75 were as small.

Rentals for three-tenths of the nonfarm vacancies included amounts for all utilities--heat, water, light, and cooking fuel. The low rentals included all utilities less frequently than the high rentals. Rentals for two-tenths of the vacancies under \$30 included all utilities, as compared with four-tenths of the rentals over \$75.

Available rental vacancies inside standard metropolitan areas were smaller, generally were apartments rather than single-unit houses, had higher rents, and had been vacant for shorter periods of time than those outside the areas.

Available-for-sale vacancies

As with the available rental vacancies, characteristics of vacancies for sale in the fourth quarter did not differ significantly from the characteristics of vacancies for sale in the two previous quarters.

The average (median) size of vacancies for sale was 5.1 rooms. The bulk of the vacancies for sale was equally divided between 2- and 3-bedroom units; approximately two-fifths were in each group. The remainder was divided between units containing only 1 bedroom and those having 4 bedrooms or more (9 and 13 percent, respectively).

Units available for sale tended to remain vacant for a longer period than rental units. At the time of enumeration, four-tenths of the

vacancies for sale, compared with three-tenths of the rental vacancies, had been vacant for four months or longer.

For nonfarm vacancies for sale, the median price asked was \$10,800, which is virtually the same as the median for the available-for-sale vacancies in the previous quarter but considerably higher than the \$8,500 median for the supply available in April 1950. The price is the amount asked at the time of enumeration and may differ from the selling price. Further, the price asked is for units that are vacant and may not reflect the current value of all homes (occupied and vacant).

Vacancies for sale include houses that have been previously occupied as well as newly constructed ones. The latter group constitutes much the smaller proportion of vacant units for sale.

Total year-round vacancies

During the fourth quarter, vacant dwelling units that were available for rent or available for sale comprised less than half the total year-round vacancies. The remaining half included vacant units that had already been rented or sold, units held off the market by the owner, and dilapidated units.

Approximately 0.4 percent of the total dwelling units were vacant units which had been rented or sold but not yet occupied (and were for year-round use and not dilapidated). The count of units in this group is often included in the measure of the potential supply of available housing because, as families move into them, the units they vacate frequently become available for occupancy. The proportion of such units varied only slightly from one region to another.

Vacant units held off the rental or sale market for other reasons (and for year-round use and not dilapidated) amounted to 2.0 percent of the total inventory. Some were held for occasional occupancy by their owners and some were reserved for servants, caretakers, janitors, and the like; others were held off the market for personal reasons of the owner; and still others were not offered for rent or sale because they were in locations where there was little demand for housing, especially areas where the popula-

tion in recent years increased very little or has declined. The bulk of the units "held off the market" were in rural areas; many of these were left standing idle by farmers who cultivated the land but did not use the house. The West had the largest proportion of vacancies held off the market (3.8 percent), and the Northeast had the smallest (0.9 percent).

Year-round vacancies which were dilapidated constituted 1.2 percent of the total housing. These vacancies were found largely in rural areas where there was little or no demand for housing and units were frequently left idle and neglected. Of the four regions, the South continued to have the largest proportion--2.2 percent.

Because of their structural condition, dilapidated vacancies are not considered part of the available housing supply, although some of them are offered for rent or sale. Vacancies in the dilapidated group are among the units most likely to drop out of the housing inventory. Vacant units which are unfit for human habitation or deteriorated to the extent that they are no longer considered living quarters are not included in the statistics for this report.

The three groups of year-round vacancies (rented or sold, held off market, and dilapidated), added to the available vacancies, bring the total year-round vacancy rate to 6.3 percent.

Seasonal units

Approximately 2.4 percent of the total dwelling units were seasonal units which were either vacant or occupied temporarily by persons who had a usual residence elsewhere. About half the seasonal units were in the Northeast, and the remainder were about evenly distributed throughout the three other regions.

In addition to vacation homes for summer or winter recreational use, seasonal units include cabins and houses reserved for loggers, herders, or migratory farm laborers who would occupy the quarters during the work season. Vacation homes for use during the summer constituted over three-fourths of the seasonal units. The great majority of the seasonal units were located in resort areas outside cities, and a small proportion were on farms for the use of migrant laborers.

Table 1.--VACANT DWELLING UNITS BY CONDITION AND STATUS, FOR THE UNITED STATES, BY REGIONS: FOURTH QUARTER 1955 AND APRIL 1950
(Percent distribution)

Condition and status	Fourth quarter 1955					April 1950				
	United States	North-east	North Central	South	West	United States	North-east	North Central	South	West
All dwelling units.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Year-round vacant:										
Not dilapidated.....	5.1	2.9	3.9	6.4	8.4	3.3	2.5	2.6	3.9	5.0
For rent or for sale (available).....	2.7	1.6	2.1	3.5	4.1	1.6	1.1	1.1	2.0	2.7
For rent.....	2.2	1.2	1.7	3.0	3.2	1.1	0.7	0.7	1.5	2.0
For sale only.....	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7
Rented or sold, awaiting occupancy...	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.5					
Held off market ¹	2.0	0.9	1.4	2.6	3.8	1.7	1.4	1.5	1.9	2.3
Dilapidated ¹	1.2	0.3	0.9	2.2	1.0	1.1	0.4	0.8	2.2	1.0
Seasonal ¹	2.4	4.9	1.4	1.3	2.4	2.5	3.9	2.2	1.4	2.3
Occupied.....	91.3	91.9	93.8	90.1	88.2	93.1	93.2	94.4	92.5	91.7

¹ Comprises unoccupied units and units temporarily occupied by nonresidents, that is, persons with usual residence elsewhere.

Table 2.--VACANT DWELLING UNITS BY CONDITION AND STATUS, FOR THE UNITED STATES, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREAS: FOURTH QUARTER 1955 AND APRIL 1950
(Percent distribution)

Condition and status	Fourth quarter 1955			April 1950		
	Total	Inside standard metropolitan areas	Outside standard metropolitan areas	Total	Inside standard metropolitan areas	Outside standard metropolitan areas
All dwelling units.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Year-round vacant:						
Not dilapidated.....	5.1	4.0	6.5	3.3	2.8	4.0
For rent or for sale (available).....	2.7	2.5	2.9	1.6	1.6	1.6
For rent.....	2.2	1.9	2.5	1.1	1.1	1.2
For sale only.....	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4
Rented or sold, awaiting occupancy...	0.4	0.5	0.3			
Held off market ¹	2.0	1.0	3.3	1.7	1.2	2.4
Dilapidated ¹	1.2	0.4	2.2	1.1	0.4	2.0
Seasonal ¹	2.4	1.1	4.2	2.5	1.1	4.0
Occupied.....	91.3	94.5	87.1	93.1	95.7	90.0

¹ See footnote 1, table 1.

Table 3.--VACANT DWELLING UNITS BY CONDITION AND STATUS, FOR THE UNITED STATES, URBAN AND RURAL: FOURTH QUARTER 1955 AND APRIL 1950
(Percent distribution)

Condition and status	Fourth quarter 1955			April 1950		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
All dwelling units.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Year-round vacant:						
Not dilapidated.....	5.1	4.2	6.6	3.3	2.7	4.4
For rent or for sale (available).....	2.7	2.8	2.5	1.6	1.7	1.5
For rent.....	2.2	2.3	2.0	1.1	1.2	1.0
For sale only.....	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Rented or sold, awaiting occupancy...	0.4	0.5	0.3			
Held off market ¹	2.0	0.9	3.8	1.7	1.0	2.9
Dilapidated ¹	1.2	0.5	2.4	1.1	0.3	2.5
Seasonal ¹	2.4	0.6	5.6	2.5	0.6	5.8
Occupied.....	91.3	94.7	85.4	93.1	96.4	87.3

¹ See footnote 1, table 1.

Table 4.--CHARACTERISTICS OF AVAILABLE VACANT DWELLING UNITS, FOR THE UNITED STATES: FOURTH QUARTER 1955

(Percent distribution)

Characteristic	Percent	Characteristic	Percent
AVAILABLE VACANT UNITS FOR RENT		AVAILABLE VACANT UNITS FOR SALE	
Number of Rooms in Unit		Number of Rooms in Unit	
Total.....	100	Total.....	100
1 to 2 rooms.....	28	3 rooms or less.....	7
3 rooms.....	33	4 rooms.....	23
4 rooms.....	20	5 rooms.....	31
5 rooms or more.....	19	6 rooms or more.....	39
Median number of rooms.....	3.2	Median number of rooms.....	5.1
Number of Bedrooms in Unit		Number of Bedrooms in Unit	
Total.....	100	Total.....	100
No bedroom.....	14	1 bedroom.....	9
1 bedroom.....	46	2 bedrooms.....	39
2 bedrooms.....	29	3 bedrooms.....	39
3 bedrooms or more.....	11	4 bedrooms or more.....	13
Number of Dwelling Units in Structure		Number of Dwelling Units in Structure	
Total.....	100	Total.....	100
1 dwelling unit.....	40	1 dwelling unit.....	90
2 dwelling units.....	18	2 dwelling units.....	8
3 to 4 dwelling units.....	18	3 dwelling units or more.....	2
5 to 9 dwelling units.....	13		
10 dwelling units or more.....	11		
Duration of Vacancy at Time of Enumeration		Duration of Vacancy at Time of Enumeration	
Total.....	100	Total.....	100
Less than 1 month.....	36	Less than 1 month.....	19
1 to 2 months.....	16	1 to 2 months.....	14
2 to 4 months.....	18	2 to 4 months.....	27
4 months or more.....	30	4 months or more.....	40

Table 5.—MONTHLY RENT AND SALE PRICE ASKED FOR NONFARM AVAILABLE VACANT DWELLING UNITS, FOR THE UNITED STATES: FOURTH QUARTER 1955 AND APRIL 1950

(Percent distribution)

Monthly rent	Fourth quarter 1955	April 1950	Sale price asked	Fourth quarter 1955	April 1950
NONFARM AVAILABLE VACANT UNITS FOR RENT			NONFARM AVAILABLE VACANT UNITS FOR SALE ¹		
Total.....	100	100	Total.....	100	100
Less than \$30.....	22	27	Less than \$5,000.....	12	17
\$30 to \$39.....	16	18	\$5,000 to \$7,999.....	19	27
\$40 to \$49.....	14	15	\$8,000 to \$9,999.....	12	22
\$50 to \$59.....	18	11	\$10,000 to \$14,999.....	30	21
\$60 to \$74.....	18	11	\$15,000 or more.....	27	12
\$75 to \$99.....	9	10	Median price.....	\$10,800	\$8,500
\$100 or more.....	3	7			
Median rent.....	\$48	\$43			

¹ Restricted to 1-dwelling-unit properties without business.

DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Except for the few instances noted below, the concepts and definitions used in the 1955 quarterly survey are identical with those used in the 1950 Census. However, the content of the 1955 survey differed slightly from the 1950 Census. In 1955, but not in 1950, information was collected on the number of bedrooms, duration of vacancy, and inclusion of utilities in rent. On the other hand, the 1950 Census included questions on plumbing facilities and year built. In both years, information was obtained on number of rooms in the unit, number of dwelling units in the structure, condition, status, monthly rent, and sale price.

The major portion of the 1955 definitions is presented below. More complete definitions and explanations, as well as some discussion of the development of the concepts, are contained in 1950 Census of Housing, Volume I, General Characteristics.

Urban-rural residence.--Urban housing comprises all dwelling units in (a) places of 2,500 inhabitants or more incorporated as cities, boroughs, and villages, (b) incorporated towns of 2,500 inhabitants or more except in New England, New York, and Wisconsin, where "towns" are simply minor civil divisions of counties, (c) the densely settled urban fringe around cities of 50,000 inhabitants or more, including both incorporated and unincorporated areas, and (d) unincorporated places of 2,500 inhabitants or more outside any urban fringe. The remaining dwelling units are classified as rural.

The urban classification thus includes, in addition to dwelling units in urban places, the housing in closely settled areas in the vicinity of large cities. These areas, known as the "urban fringe," were established to conform as nearly as possible to the actual boundaries of thickly settled territory, usually characterized by a closely spaced street pattern. Urban fringe areas were set up for each city of 50,000 inhabitants or more just prior to the 1950 Census. Thus, some concentrations of new housing just outside the urban fringe may be classified as rural.

The definition for urban housing, given above, is that used for the 1950 Census. The identification and boundaries of urban places and urban fringes established for the 1950 Census were not brought up to date for the 1955 statistics so that the designation of urban housing is the same for both years.

The rural classification comprises a variety of residences, such as isolated homes in the open country and dwelling units in villages and hamlets of fewer than 2,500 inhabitants.

Nonfarm residence.--Nonfarm dwelling units are defined to include all units not on farms. For occupied units, the farm-nonfarm classification is based on the respondent's reply to the question, "Is this house on a farm?" Farm residence is, therefore,

determined without regard to the occupation of the members of the household and reflects local usage rather than the uniform application of an objective definition.

Dwelling units located on farm land where cash rent is paid for the house and yard only, and dwelling units on institutional grounds and in summer camps and tourist courts, were classified as nonfarm.

For vacant units, the farm-nonfarm classification depends on whether the residents in the vicinity consider the place to be a farm. Because of the difficulty in obtaining a reliable classification for many vacant units in rural areas, no separate vacancy rates are provided for farm and nonfarm units. However, the classification is considered sufficiently reliable to provide percentage distributions for rent and value data, which are restricted to nonfarm units.

Standard metropolitan areas.--Except in New England, a standard metropolitan area is a county or group of contiguous counties which contains at least one city of 50,000 inhabitants or more at the time of the 1950 Census. Counties contiguous to the one containing such a city are included in a standard metropolitan area if according to certain criteria they are essentially metropolitan in character and socially and economically integrated with the central city. In New England, towns and cities were the units used in defining standard metropolitan areas. Here a population density criterion was applied rather than the criteria relating to metropolitan character.

Statistics for "inside standard metropolitan areas" in table 2 are for all vacant dwelling units--urban and rural, farm and nonfarm--which are located within the counties and places comprising standard metropolitan areas.

For a list of all standard metropolitan areas, and their constituent counties (cities, towns), refer to the individual chapters (or bulletins) in the 1950 Census of Housing, Volume I, General Characteristics; or to the 1950 Census of Population, Volume I, Number of Inhabitants, or Volume II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 1, United States Summary.

The standard metropolitan areas were established at the time of the 1950 Census. Both the 1950 and 1955 statistics relate to these same (168) areas. A map identifying the standard metropolitan areas and their location is given on page 12 of this report.

Dwelling units.--In general, a dwelling unit is a group of rooms or a single room occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters by a family or other group of persons living together or by a person living alone.

Ordinarily, a dwelling unit is a house, an apartment, or a flat. A dwelling unit may be located

in a structure devoted to business or other nonresidential use, such as quarters in a warehouse where the watchman lives or a merchant's quarters in back of his shop. Trailers, boats, tents, and railroad cars, when occupied as living quarters, are included in the dwelling unit inventory; if vacant, however, such accommodations are excluded.

A group of rooms, occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters, is a dwelling unit if it has separate cooking equipment or separate entrance. A single room, occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters, is a dwelling unit if it has separate cooking equipment or if it constitutes the only living quarters in the structure. Each apartment in a regular apartment house is a dwelling unit even though it may not have separate cooking equipment. Apartments in residential hotels are dwelling units if they have separate cooking equipment or consist of two or more rooms. Since it is customary in some localities for the intended occupants to furnish their own cooking equipment, vacant units were considered as having cooking equipment if they were currently equipped with or if the last occupants had such equipment.

Living quarters of the following types are not included in the dwelling unit inventory: Sleeping rooms in rooming houses; transient accommodations (tourist courts, hotels, etc., predominantly for transients); and barracks for workers (railroad, construction, etc.). Living quarters in institutions (for delinquent or dependent children, handicapped persons, the aged, prisoners, etc.), general hospitals, and military installations are likewise excluded from the dwelling unit inventory except for dwelling units in buildings containing only family quarters for staff members.

Occupied dwelling units.--A dwelling unit is occupied if a person or group of persons was living in it at the time of enumeration or if the occupants were only temporarily absent, as for example, on vacation. The persons living in the unit must consider it their usual place of residence or have no usual place of residence elsewhere. The count of occupied dwelling units is the same as the count of households. (See also section on "Nonresident dwelling units.")

Nonresident dwelling units.--A nonresident dwelling unit is a unit which is occupied temporarily by persons who usually live elsewhere, provided the usual place of residence is held for the household and is not offered for rent or for sale. For example, a beach cottage occupied at the time of enumeration by a family which has a usual place of residence in the city is considered a nonresident unit. Their house in the city would be reported "occupied" and would be included in the count of occupied units since the occupants are only temporarily absent.

Nonresident units in the 1955 statistics are included with seasonal units or with year-round

vacant units as dilapidated, or not dilapidated but held off the market, as the case may be. In the 1950 reports, the nonresident units were shown as a separate category; for comparison with the 1955 results, however, these units were distributed among seasonal, dilapidated, and not dilapidated units held off the market.

Vacant dwelling units.--A dwelling unit (furnished or unfurnished) is vacant if no persons were living in it at the time of enumeration, except when its occupants were only temporarily absent. Dilapidated vacant dwelling units were included if they were intended for occupancy as living quarters; however, if the unit was unfit for use and beyond repair so that it was no longer considered living quarters, it was excluded from the inventory. New units not yet occupied were enumerated as vacant dwelling units if construction had proceeded to the point that all the exterior windows and doors were installed and final usable floors were in place; otherwise, potential units under construction were not included. Unoccupied units held off the market for various reasons and units recently rented or sold but not yet occupied are considered vacant.

Vacant sleeping rooms in lodginghouses, transient accommodations, barracks, and other quarters not defined as dwelling units are not included in the statistics in this report. (See section on "Dwelling units.")

Seasonal units.--Seasonal dwelling units are those intended for occupancy during only a portion of the year and are found primarily in resort areas. In farm areas, dwelling units used for only a portion of the year to house migratory workers employed during the crop season are classified as seasonal.

Seasonal units comprise unoccupied seasonal units and seasonal units temporarily occupied by nonresidents. Units in resort areas occupied by persons who considered the unit their usual place of residence or had no other place of residence are classified as occupied. (See also section on "Occupied dwelling units.")

Year-round vacant units.--Year-round units are those intended for year-round occupancy, even though they may not be in use the year round. In resort areas, a dwelling unit which is usually occupied on a year-round basis was considered a year-round unit. On the other hand, a dwelling unit located in the closely built-up area of a nonresort city was considered a "year-round" unit even though it may be occupied only part of the year. As indicated above, year-round units temporarily occupied by persons with usual residence elsewhere are included with year-round vacant units.

Condition of dwelling unit.--The structural condition of a dwelling unit is considered one of the measures of the quality of housing. To measure condition, the vacant dwelling units were classified as "not dilapidated" or "dilapidated."

A dwelling unit was reported as dilapidated when it had serious deficiencies, was rundown or neglected, or was of inadequate original construction, so that it did not provide adequate shelter or protection against the elements or endangered the safety of the occupants. A dwelling unit was reported as dilapidated if, because of either deterioration or inadequate original construction, it was below the generally accepted minimum standard for housing and should be torn down or extensively repaired or rebuilt.

The types of deficiencies used in determining condition relate to weather tightness, extent of disrepair, hazards to safety, and inadequate or makeshift construction. Deficiencies which could be revealed only by an engineering survey, or such deficiencies as inadequate light or ventilation, or the presence of dampness or infestation, were not included among the criteria for determining condition of a dwelling unit.

Specifically, a dwelling unit was reported as dilapidated if--

1. It had one or more critical deficiencies, as for example--

- a. Holes, open cracks, rotted, loose, or missing materials over a considerable area of the foundation, outside walls, roof, or inside walls, floors, or ceilings.
- b. Substantial sagging of floors, walls, or roof.
- c. Extensive damage by storm, flood, or fire;

or

2. It had a combination of minor deficiencies which were present in sufficient number and extent to give evidence that the unit did not provide adequate shelter or protection against the elements or was physically unsafe. Examples of these deficiencies are--

- a. Holes, open cracks, rotted, loose, or missing materials over a small area.
- b. Shaky or unsafe porch, steps, or railings.
- c. Broken or missing window panes.
- d. Rotted or loose window frames which are no longer rainproof or windproof.
- e. Damaged, unsafe, or makeshift chimney.
- f. Broken, loose, or missing inside stair treads or risers, balusters, or railings.
- g. Deep wear on doorsills, doorframes, outside or inside steps, or floors;

or

3. It was of inadequate original construction. Examples of inadequate original construction are--

- a. Makeshift walls.
- b. Lack of foundation.
- c. Dirt floors.
- d. Inadequately converted cellars, garages, barns, and similar places.

The enumerator determined the condition of the dwelling unit on the basis of his own observation. He was instructed to appraise the condition of units uniformly, regardless of the neighborhood. The enumerator was provided with detailed written instructions and with pictures illustrating the concepts "deterioration" and "inadequate original construction."

Although the enumerator was provided with detailed oral and written instructions and with visual aids, it was not possible to eliminate completely the element of judgment in the enumeration of this item. It is possible that some enumerators obtained too large or too small a count of dilapidated units. However, with the large number of enumerators involved, it is likely that such deviations tend to be offsetting.

Available vacant units.--This category provides a measure of vacant dwelling units which are on the housing market for year-round occupancy. It consists of units which are for year-round occupancy, are not dilapidated, and are being offered for rent or sale. Excluded are seasonal units, dilapidated units, and units already rented or sold or not on the rental or sale market for other reasons. The count of available vacancies constitutes a more effective measure of the supply of vacant housing than does the count of total vacancies. This category is comparable with the 1950 category "Nonseasonal not dilapidated, for rent or sale."

The category "For rent" consists of vacant units offered for rent as well as those being offered both for rent and for sale. The category "For sale only" is limited to units for sale and not for rent. If a unit was located in a multi-unit structure which was for sale as an entire structure, and if the unit was not for rent, it was reported as "held off market." However, in a 2- or 3-dwelling-unit structure which was for sale, the unit intended to be occupied by the owner was reported as for sale.

Vacant units rented or sold.--This group consists of year-round not dilapidated vacant units which have been rented or sold but the new renters or owners have not moved in as of the day of enumeration. In the 1950 statistics, such units are shown in combination with year-round not dilapidated vacant units held off the market.

Vacant units held off the market.--Included in this category are year-round not dilapidated units which were vacant for reasons other than those mentioned above: for example, held for occupancy of a caretaker, janitor, and the like; held for settlement of estate; held for personal reasons of the owner; temporarily used for storage; and temporarily occupied by persons who have a usual place of residence elsewhere. In the 1950 statistics, such units are shown in combination with year-round not dilapidated vacant units, rented or sold, as "nonseasonal not dilapidated, not for rent or sale" units.

Number of rooms.--All rooms which are to be used, or are suitable for use, as living quarters were counted in determining the number of rooms in the dwelling unit. Included are kitchens, bedrooms, dining rooms, living rooms, and permanently enclosed sunporches of substantial size; and finished basement or attic rooms, recreation rooms, or other rooms suitable for use as living quarters. A kitchenette or half-room which is partitioned off from floor to ceiling was counted as a separate room, but a combined kitchenette and dinette separated only by shelves or cabinets was counted as only one room. Not counted as rooms were bathrooms, strip or pullman kitchens, halls or foyers, alcoves, pantries, laundries, closets or storage space, and unfinished basement or attic rooms not suitable for living quarters.

The median number of rooms is the theoretical value which divides the dwelling units equally, one-half having more rooms and one-half having fewer rooms than the median. In the computation of the median, a continuous distribution was assumed. For example, when the median was in the 3-room group, the lower and upper limits were assumed to be 2.5 and 3.5, respectively. Tenthths were used in the computation of the median to permit comparisons.

Number of bedrooms.--Only rooms intended primarily to be slept in were counted as bedrooms. A bed-living room or a den intended primarily for purposes other than sleeping was not counted as a bedroom. A 1-room apartment, therefore, was reported as having no bedroom. Also, space which could be made into bedrooms (the upper floor of a 1½-story house, for example) was not counted as a bedroom unless it was finished off and suitable for use as living quarters.

Number of dwelling units in structure.--A structure either stands by itself or has vertical walls dividing it from all other structures. The count of dwelling units in a structure is the total number of units in the structure, including both occupied and vacant units. A structure may be detached, attached, or semidetached. A detached structure has open space on all four sides; an attached structure is one of a row of three or more adjoining structures, or is a structure attached to a nonresidential structure; while a semidetached structure is one of two adjoining residential structures, each with open space on the remaining three sides. In apartment developments, each building with open space on all sides is considered a separate structure.

The statistics reflect the number of vacant dwelling units classified by the number of dwelling units in the structure in which they are located, rather than on the number of residential structures that contain vacant units.

In the 1955 survey, data were obtained on the number of dwelling units in the structure, regardless of the type of structure (detached, attached,

or semidetached) in which the unit was located. In the 1950 Census, statistics for 1- and 2-dwelling-unit structures were compiled by type of structure as well as by number of dwelling units in the structure.

Duration of vacancy.--The length of time a dwelling unit was vacant was computed from the day the unit became vacant until the day of enumeration. It should be noted that the time period is not the total time a unit remains unoccupied nor the time a unit has been in a particular vacancy status, but it is the duration of vacancy up to the day of enumeration. For newly constructed units, it represents the time period since the date when the unit was considered a vacancy, that is, when construction had reached the point that all exterior windows and doors were installed and final usable floors were in place.

The time intervals used in the tables represent full months, calculated from a date in the month to the same date the following months. For example, if the unit became vacant on September 29 and was still vacant on the day of enumeration, November 17, the time reported would be "1 to 2 months," meaning that the unit had been vacant for more than one month but less than two months. Or if the unit became vacant on October 25 and was still vacant on November 17, the time reported would be "less than 1 month."

Monthly rent.--The monthly rent is the amount asked for the unit at the time of enumeration, regardless of whether it is to include furniture, heating fuel, electricity, cooking fuel, water, or other services. If the amount of rent were to vary during the year, the rent reported was the monthly amount asked at the time of enumeration. The data on rent for this report are limited to nonfarm available vacant dwelling units for rent. Rent statistics are not provided for vacant farm dwelling units because of the difficulty of separating the rental for the dwelling unit from the rental for the entire farm unit.

The median monthly rent of the dwelling units is the rent which divides the series into two equal parts, one-half of the units with rents higher than the median and the other half with rents lower than the median. In the computation of the median, a continuous distribution was assumed; and the limits of the class intervals were assumed to stand at the midpoints of the 1-dollar interval between the end of one of the rent groups and the beginning of the next. For example, the limits of the interval designated \$30 to \$39 were assumed to be \$29.50 and \$39.50.

Inclusion of utilities in rent.--The utilities included in the inquiry were heat, light, cooking fuel, and water. The statistics reflect whether all or not all of these utilities are provided for in the amount of rent asked at the time of enumeration, not what could be provided for more or less rent. Data on the inclusion of utilities are limited to nonfarm available vacant units for rent.

Sale price of 1-dwelling-unit structures.--The sale price is the amount asked for the property, including the structure and its land. Value data are limited to vacant nonfarm units in 1-dwelling-unit structures, without business, and with only one dwelling unit included in the property. The statistics on sale price for this report are limited to nonfarm available vacant units for sale. Values for other available units for sale are not provided because they would reflect varying amounts for farm land, business uses, or for more than one dwelling unit in the property.

The median sale price of the dwelling units is the amount which divides the series into two equal parts, one-half of the units with prices higher than the median and the other half with prices lower than the median. The median was computed on the basis of more detailed tabulation groups than are shown in the tables and was rounded to the nearest hundred dollars.

SOURCE AND RELIABILITY OF DATA

The estimates for 1955 presented in this report are based on data obtained in connection with the monthly population sample survey of the Bureau of the Census. This sample is spread over 230 sample areas comprising 453 counties and independent cities. A total of 24,000 to 26,000 dwelling units and other living quarters were designated for the sample during each of the three months covered by the report. Of this total, 21,000 to 23,000 were occupied dwelling units; 2,000 were vacant dwelling units; and the remainder were units which, at the time of enumeration, had been converted to commercial use, had been demolished, etc., or were not living quarters within the scope of the survey. Detailed information was obtained for each vacant unit in the sample.

The data for 1950 are based on the returns of the 1950 Census of Housing, and represent the results of a complete enumeration.

Since the 1955 statistics presented in this report are based on a sample, they are subject to sampling variability and may be expected to differ from results that would have been obtained from a complete count in which identical enumeration techniques were employed. The standard error is a meas-

ure of sampling variability. The chances are about 68 out of 100 that the difference due to sampling variability between an estimate and the figure that would have been obtained from a complete enumeration is less than the standard error. The chances are about 95 out of 100 that the difference is less than twice the standard error and about 99 out of 100 that it is less than 2½ times the standard error.

The standard errors of a few of the more important statistics are shown below. To illustrate: the available vacancy rate for the United States for the quarter is estimated as 2.7 percent. According to the table below, the standard error of this estimate is about 0.1 percent. The chances are, therefore, about 68 out of 100 that a complete enumeration would have yielded an estimate between 2.6 and 2.8 percent.

Table B.--STANDARD ERROR OF AVAILABLE VACANCY RATES
(Range of 68 chances out of 100)

Region	Rate for quarter	Standard error of rate	Quarter-to-quarter difference	Standard error of difference
United States.....	2.7	0.1	0.4	0.1
Northeast.....	1.6	0.1	0.2	0.1
North Central.....	2.1	0.2	0.4	0.1
South.....	3.5	0.2	0.6	0.2
West.....	4.1	0.4	0.1	0.5

Comparison of characteristics of vacancies for the fourth quarter with those for the second and third quarters 1955 (Series H-111, Nos. 1 and 2) reveals that many of the differences are small. A small difference, particularly when it is based on a small subclass of vacant dwelling units, should be interpreted with care. As can be seen from the table above, the sampling variability in such cases may be large relative to the difference.

In addition to sampling variability, the data are subject to biases due to errors of response and nonreporting. Factors affecting accuracy of reporting are the respondent's knowledge of the facts and the enumerator's ability to obtain accurate information and classify the unit with respect to such items as condition, seasonal status, number of rooms, rent, sale price, and the like. The 1950 data also are subject to such possible biases.

Figure 1.—REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES

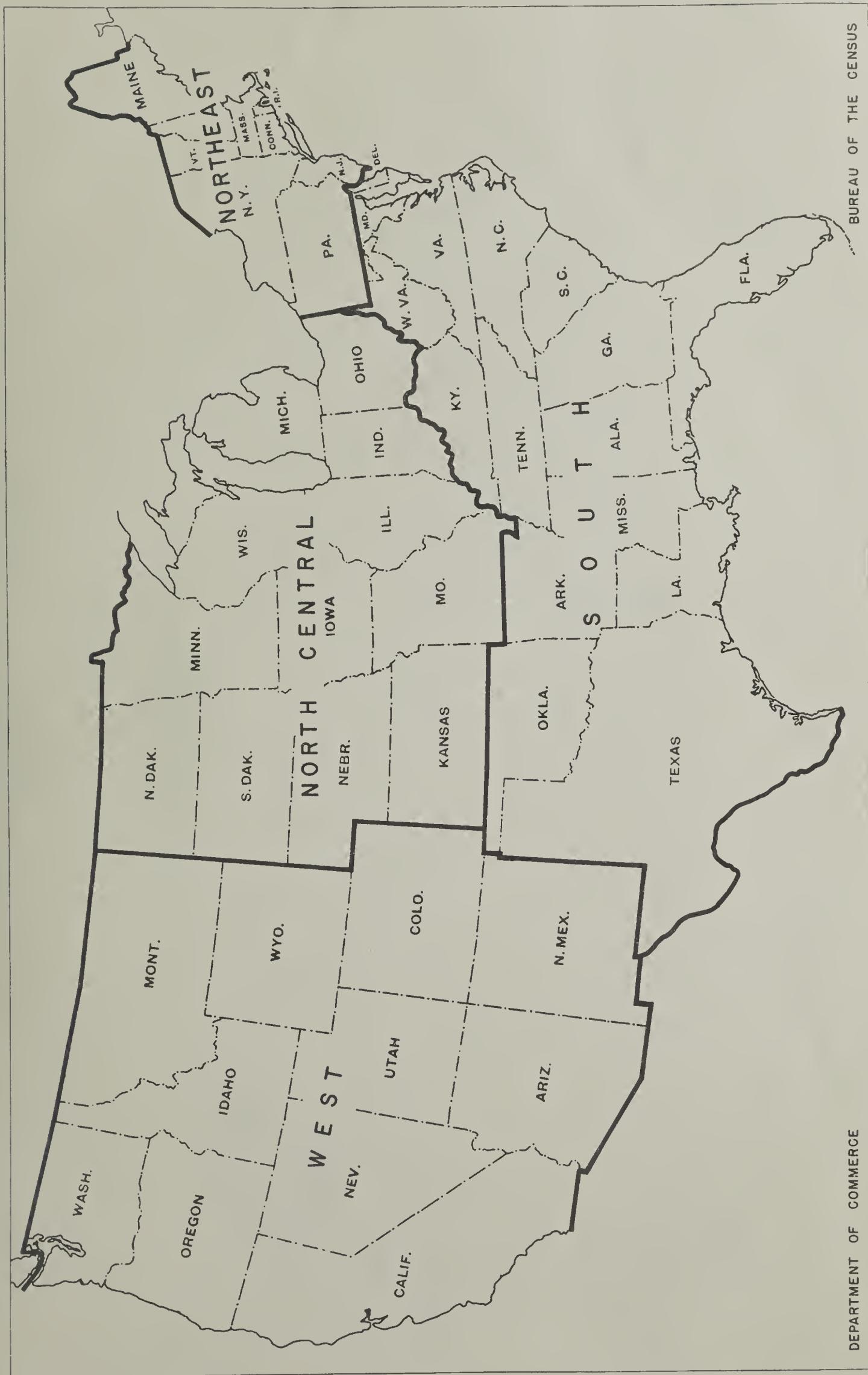


Figure 2.—STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREAS: 1950

